

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Lech Lecha How Does Avraham's Journey Reflect the Spiritual Journey of Every Jew?

Why Did I Choose to Teach Parashat Lech Lecha for Numerous Years?

Parashat Lech Lecha is one of my favorites because it is about G-d charging Avraham and Sarah with the mission to follow Him to the Land of Israel. Avraham and Sarah's journey toward the land, while forging their relationship with Hashem, parallels my own and the journeys of most of my students in so many ways. As Ramban teaches "The actions of the (fore)fathers are an indication to their children" (Ramban, *Bereishit* 12:6). Just as G-d told Avraham, "*Lech lecha* - go to yourself," to your source, each of us is always trying to grow spiritually whether we are fully aware of it or not. Since we can all identify with leaving our country, birthplace, and our father's house, I have chosen to teach *Parashat Lech Lecha* and continued to teach it for numerous years. For most students from abroad (including myself 45 years ago), it can be challenging to uproot ourselves from our well-known surroundings and replant ourselves in an unknown land with a foreign language and culture. Therefore, we are soothed by Rashi's comforting words which resonate so well with our own inner truth: "Go for yourself - for your own benefit, for your own good" (Rashi, *Bereishit* 12:1). Going to the land of Israel, for a born Jew or a Jew to be, is a spiritual journey to the essence of our soul which is enrooted deeply in the Holy Land. Our connection to the Land of Israel is like the relationship of our soul to the body. Without the Land of Israel, we are a mere shadow of our inner potential, unable to truly express our Jewish Neshama. The Divine gift of the Promised Land to Avraham's descendants has its own positive deeper purpose that transcends any rational explanations. When G-d told Avraham לֵךְ לְךָ/Lech lecha, He didn't reveal where to go, because his true destination was the internal journey to the essence of his soul. Avraham was to go to the place from where he was created, which is the Temple Mount. For humanity is created from the place of his atonement. The Temple below is connected to the Temple above. From this place, the souls descend and ascend on the ladder (Kli Yakar, *Bereishit* 12:1). In my own spiritual journey, at that very place, I discovered my soul! Any tourist visiting Israel ends up sooner or later at the Western Wall. I just stood there, in awe of the sense of sanctity that pervaded the place, without a word of prayer crystallizing on my lips. The intense light reflected by the ancient stones penetrated the empty space in my very heart and soul. As I entered the square in front of the Wall, I knew that I had finally come home.

Eretz Yisrael the Land of Prophecy

סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרָק יב פְּסוּק א

וַיֹּאמֶר הָשֵׁם אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה:

"Hashem said to Avram, 'Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (*Bereishit* 12:1).

Why didn't Hashem reveal to Avraham which land he was leading him to? According to Rashi, by not revealing his destination at once, Avraham would value the land so much more. In addition, Hashem wanted to reward Avraham for fulfilling His commandment each step of the way. Another reason is that it's impossible to perceive the meaning of the Land of Israel outside of the land. Many newcomers to Israel can testify to how they had to arrive here before understanding what Eretz Yisrael is all about. In this spirit, Kli Yakar explains that G-d did not want to show Avraham the original place of body and soul until he first received a Divine spirit from above. Since prophecy does not exist outside the land of Israel, whenever he was still outside the land of Israel, he did not understand the essence of the soul whose

source is at the Temple Mount. He could not even understand the core of the formation of the physical from there. Only within the land of Israel – the place prepared for prophecy – could G-d show him the goodness of this holy place and how it is the place of the essence of humanity, for there is his home and the place from where both his body and soul emanate. Therefore, it is fitting to leave everything behind to go and cleave to this holy place, for from there we will be able to cleave to the Divine presence... (Kli Yakar, *Bereishit* 12:1).

“The Land that I Will Show You” – Our Dynamic Relationship with the Land of Israel

The phrase הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה – “...the land that I will show you,” can also be understood as “the land to which I will show you.” (The suffix אֶ/cha – “you” can be read both as – ‘I will show the land to you,’ or as ‘I will show you to the land.’ In the holy tongue, the root of the word to see or to show ה-א-ר/resh, alef, heh is also the root of the word רְאִי/ra’ui – ‘seen,’ ‘fitting’ or ‘suitable.’ Thus, the meaning of the word אֶרְאֶה /areka – I will show you to her and her to you. For one without the other is not seen (fitting) to have the Shechina dwell successfully. When Hashem told Avraham to follow him to the land that he would show him, Hashem also alluded that Avraham and the Land of Israel are suitable for one another. Furthermore, they will be in a 2-way relationship. The land is not only seen by Avraham, Avraham is also seen by the land. (Based on Ohr Hachayim, *Bereishit* 12:1). Just as the painter sees the tree, the tree sees the painter. Hashem is saying, “I will show you to her, and I will show her to you.” In Israel, you will experience and feel as if the land looks back on you. Here we are not only a subject but also an object. Be’er Mayim explains the phrase, “In the land, I will reveal myself to you.” That is, only in the Holy Land does G-d reveal Himself to us. The land of Israel endows us with a new quality of seeing, it is the quality of mutual relationship with Hashem, the land, and with ourselves. Perhaps we can say that Israel is “The Land of Relationship.”

“The Land of Israel is Acquired through Suffering”

Why wasn’t Avraham born in the Land of Israel? Why did he have to undergo the extreme difficulties of uprooting himself from his familiar surroundings and enduring ten increasingly difficult tests? Avraham served as our predecessor by overcoming tests and challenges to deserve the Holy Land. “The Land of Israel is acquired through suffering” (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 5a). To reach Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish people demonstrated complete commitment to her. Throughout the exile, ascending to Eretz Yisrael was most difficult, with many dying en route. In most generations, the majority of those who succeeded in reaching the Land were forced to live in poverty. Establishing the State of Israel also involved great self-sacrifice and hardships, we have been forced to fight for her. Had Avraham not undergone his great challenges to earn the merit of the Land of Israel for his descendants, the Land would not and could not have become part of the heart of Jews, nor would we have been privileged to return to her and live within her. The first time we encounter the need to suffer to merit the Land of Israel is in chapter 15 of *Bereishit*. In the *Covenant Between the Pieces*, G-d promised the Land to Avraham’s descendants who would have to first go through oppression during the Egyptian exile (*Bereishit* 15:13). Still, today during our current war, the suffering continues as our brave, devoted, and holy soldiers are risking their lives fighting for our safety.

The Holocaust Teaches us About the Value of the Land of Israel

During the *Covenant Between the Pieces*, an intense fright and a great darkness fell upon Avraham as he was shown a vision of a smoking furnace which is dreadfully reminiscent of the holocaust:

סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרָק ט"ו פְּסוּק יז וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה וְעֵלְטָה הָיָה וְהִנֵּה תִנּוֹר עָשָׂן וְלִפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

“Now it came to pass that the sun had set, and it was dark, and behold, a smoking furnace and a torch of fire passed between these pieces” (*Bereishit* 15:17).

Indeed, this pasuk includes a Torah code spelling out the word Hitler with an ELS (equal letter sequence of seven). It is not by chance that only three years following the end of the Holocaust, the land of Israel returned to Jewish hands after almost 2000 years of exile. Nobody can explain or justify the horrors of the Holocaust, but it still gives us a clue about the value of the Land of Israel, that we had to undergo suffering to this extent in order to merit the Land of Israel. Let us honor those who perished in the Holocaust by investing our energy and efforts in connecting to and building the Land of Israel! Nevertheless, we will never be able to realize the preciousness of the G-d-given land intertwined with the essence of our soul.

The Connection between Character Development and the Final Boundaries of the Land

Whenever I get up to the end of *Bereishit* Chapter 15 in my course in Parashat Lech Lecha, my students are always surprised to learn that according to the Torah, the final boundaries of the land of Israel will be so much greater than the part of the Land that we possess today. The difference between Israel today and Israel in the time of Mashiach is almost according to the same proportion as one single finger to a hand. Hashem promised Avraham not only the land of the seven Canaanite nations that King David had conquered, mentioned in *Devarim* 7:1, but also the land of three additional nations, the Kenites, the Kenisites, and the Kadmonites (See *Bereishit* 15:19-21). Ten nations are mentioned here, but He only gave them seven nations. The three first ones mentioned the Keni, Knizi, and Kadmoni are nicknames for Edom, Moav, and Amon their land will only be inherited in the future-to-come (Rashi, *Bereishit* 15:19). The Keni is Amon, The Kenizi is Moav, The Kadmoni is Edom since Amalek came from him who was the first (kadmoni) to attack Israel... (*Chizkuni*). For many years I have been teaching that I believe the ten nations correspond to the 10 sefirot. They are divided into three and seven corresponding to the three intellectual sefirot (Chabad) and the seven emotional. The ten nations were the impure husk of the sefirot (the other side). Recently I learned a Torah teaching that confirmed my assertion. Our ability to conquer the Holy Land depends on rectifying our character traits corresponding to the sefirot. Our Patriarchs were promised the land of Israel due to their rectification of the character traits that correspond to the seven lower sefirot. When Mashiach will come and rectify the three uppermost sefirot of *Keter*, *Chachma*, and *Binah*, then we will be able to conquer the entire land promised to Avraham in the *Covenant Between the Pieces*. For those of us who aren't serving in the army, fighting evil terrorists, it is good to know that we too can contribute to the victory of our current war, by working hard at refining our character.